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Farewell address

A

LETTER

TO

The People of the United States

FROM

GEORGE WASHINGTON,

ON RETIRING FROM

THE OFFICE OF PRESIDENT.

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A

LETTER

TO

The People of the United States.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE period for a new election of a Citizen to adminiſter the executive government of the United States being not far diſtant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts muſt be employed in deſignating the perſon who is to be clothed with that important truſt, it appears to me proper, eſpecially as it may conduce to a more diſtinct expreſſion of the public voice, that I ſhould now appriſe you of the reſolution I have formed, to decline being conſidered among the number of thoſe out of whom a choice is to be made.

I beg you, at the ſame time, to do me the juſtice to be aſſured, that this reſolution has not been taken without a ſtrict regard to all the conſiderations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country;

and that, in withdrawing the tender of ſervice which ſilence in my ſituation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future intereſt, no deficiency of grateful reſpect for your paſt kindneſs; but am ſupported by a full conviction that the ſtep is compatible with both.

The acceptance of, and continuance hitherto in the office to which your ſuffrages have twice called me, have been a uniform ſacrifice of inclination to the opinion of duty, and to a deference for what appeared to be your deſire. I conſtantly hoped, that it would have been much earlier in my power, conſiſtently with motives which I was not at liberty to diſregard, to return to that retirement from which I had been reluctantly drawn. The ſtrength of my inclination to do this, previous to the laſt election, had even led to the preparation of an addreſs to declare it to you; but mature reflection on the then perplexed and critical poſture of our affairs with foreign nations, and the unanimous advice of perſons entitled to my confidence, impelled me to abandon the idea.

I rejoice that the ſtate of your concerns, external as well as internal, no longer renders the purſuit of inclination incompatible with the ſentiment of duty or propriety; and I am

perſuaded, whatever partiality may be retained for my ſervices, that, in the preſent circumſtances of our country, you will not diſapprove of my determination to retire.

The impreſſions with which I firſt undertook the arduous truſt, were explained on the proper occaſion. In the diſcharge of this truſt, I will only ſay, that I have with good intentions contributed towards the organization and adminiſtration of the government, the beſt exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. Not unconſcious, in the out-ſet, of the inferiority of my qualifications, experience in my own eyes, perhaps ſtill more in the eyes of others, has ſtrengthened the motives to diffidence of myſelf; and every day the increaſing weight of years admoniſhes me more and more, that the ſhade of retirement is as neceſſary to me as it will be welcome. Satisfied, that if any circumſtances have given peculiar value to my ſervices, they were temporary. I have the conſolation to believe, that while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political ſcene, patriotiſm does not forbid it.

In looking forward to the moment which is intended to terminate the career of my public life, my feelings do not permit me to ſuſpend the deep acknowledgment of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country, for

the many honours it has conferred upon me; ſtill more for the ſtedfaſt confidence with which it has ſupported me; and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifeſting my inviolable attachment, by ſervices faithful and perſevering, though in uſefulneſs unequal to my zeal. If benefits have reſulted to our country from theſe ſervices, let it always be remembered to our praiſe, and as an inſtructive example in our annals, that under circumſtances in which the paſſions, agitated in every direction, were liable to miſlead, amidſt appearances ſometimes dubious——viſſicitudes of fortune often diſcouraging——in ſituations in which not unfrequently want of ſucceſs has countenanced the ſpirit of criticiſm—the conſtancy of your ſupport was the eſſential prop of the efforts, and a guarantee of the plans, by which they were effected.—— Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I ſhall carry it with me to my grave, as a ſtrong incitement to unceaſing vows that Heaven may continue to you the choiceſt tokens of its beneficence—that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual—that the free conſtitution, which is the work of your hands, may be ſacredly maintained—that its adminiſtration in every department may be ſtamped with wiſdom and virtue—that, in fine, the happineſs of the people of theſe States, under the auſpices of liberty, may be made complete,

by ſo careful a preſervation and ſo prudent a uſe of this bleſſing, as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applauſe, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a ſtranger to it.

Here, perhaps, I ought to ſtop. But a ſolicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehenſion of danger, natural to that ſolicitude, urge me, on an occaſion like the preſent, to offer to your ſolemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, ſome ſentiments, which are the reſult of much reflection, of no inconſiderable obſervation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a people. Theſe will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only feel in them the diſintereſted warnings of a parting friend, who can poſſibly have no perſonal motive to bias his counſel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my ſentiments on a former and not diſſimilar occaſion.

Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts, no recommendation of mine is neceſſary to fortify or confirm the attachment.

The unity of Government which conſtitutes

you one people, is alſo now dear to you. It is juſtly ſo; for it is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the ſupport of your tranquillity at home, your peace abroad; of your ſafety; of your proſperity; of that very liberty which you ſo highly prize. But as it is eaſy to foreſee, that from different cauſes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortreſs againſt which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be moſt conſtantly and actively (though often covertly and inſiduouſly) directed, it is of infinite moment, that you ſhould properly eſtimate the immenſe value of your national Union, to your collective and individual happineſs; that you ſhould cheriſh a cordial, habitual, and immoveable attachment to it; accuſtoming yourſelves to think and ſpeak of it as of the palladium of your political ſafety and proſperity; watching for its preſervation with jealous anxiety; diſcountenancing whatever may ſuggeſt even a ſuſpicion that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the firſt dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the reſt, or to enfeeble the ſacred ties which now link together the various parts.

For this you have every inducement of ſympathy and intereſt. Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, muſt always exalt the juſt pride of patriotiſm, more than any appellation derived from local diſcriminations. With ſlight ſhades of difference, you have the ſame religion, manners, habits, and political principles.—You have in a common cauſe fought and triumphed together; the independence and liberty you poſſeſs, are the work of joint councils, and joint efforts, of common dangers, ſufferings and ſucceſſes.

But theſe conſiderations, however powerfully they addreſs themſelves to your ſenſibility, are greatly outweighed by thoſe which apply more immediately to your intereſt. Here every portion of our country finds the moſt commanding motives for carefully guarding and preſerving the union of the whole.

The North, in an unreſtrained intercourſe with the South, protected by the equal laws of a common government, finds, in the productions of the latter, great additional reſources of maritime and commercial enterpriſe, and precious materials of manufacturing induſtry. The South, in the ſame intercourſe, benefitting

by the agency of the North, ſees its agriculture grow and its commerce expand. Turning partly into its own channels the ſeamen of the North, it finds its particular navigation invigorated—and while it contributes, in different ways, to nouriſh and increaſe the general maſs of the national navigation, it looks forward to the protection of a maritime ſtrength, to which itſelf is unequally adapted. The Eaſt, in a like intercourſe with the Weſt, already finds, and in the progreſſive improvement of interior communications, by land and water, will more and more find a valuable vent for the commodities which it brings from abroad, or manufactures at home. The Weſt derives from the Eaſt ſupplies requiſite to its growth and comfort—and what is perhaps of ſtill greater conſequence, it muſt of neceſſity owe the ſecure enjoyment of indiſpenſable outlets for its own productions, to the weight, influence, and the future maritime ſtrength of the Atlantic ſide of the Union, directed by an indiſſoluble community of intereſt as one nation. Any other tenure by which the Weſt can hold this eſſential advantage, whether derived from its own ſeparate ſtrength, or from an apoſtate and unnatural connection with any foreign power, muſt be intrinſically precarious.

While then every part of our country thus feels an immediate and particular intereſt in

Union, all the parts combined cannot fail to find in the united maſs of means and efforts greater ſtrength, greater reſource, proportionably greater ſecurity from external danger, a leſs frequent interruption of their peace by foreign nations; and what is of ineſtimable value, they muſt derive from Union an exemption from thoſe broils and wars between themſelves, which ſo frequently afflict neighbouring countries, not tied together by the ſame government; which their own rivalſhips alone would be ſufficient to produce, but which oppoſite foreign alliances, attachments and intrigues would ſtimulate and imbitter. Hence likewiſe they will avoid the neceſſity of thoſe overgrown military eſtabliſhments, which under any form of government are inauſpicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hoſtile to republican liberty; in this ſenſe it is, that your Union ought to be conſidered as a main prop of your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preſervation of the other.

Theſe conſiderations ſpeak a perſuaſive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the Union as a primary object of patriotic deſire. Is there a doubt, whether a common government can embrace ſo large a ſphere?---Let experience ſolve it. To liſten to mere ſpeculation in ſuch a

caſe were criminal. We are authorized to hope, that a proper organization of the whole, with the auxiliary agency of governments for the reſpective ſubdiviſions, will afford a happy iſſue to the experiment. 'Tis well worth a fair and full experiment. With ſuch powerful and obvious motives to Union, affecting all parts of our country, while experience ſhall not have demonſtrated its impracticability, there will always be reaſon to diſtruſt the patriotiſm of thoſe, who in any quarter may endeavour to weaken its bands.

In contemplating the cauſes which may diſturb our Union, it occurs as matter of ſerious concern, that any ground ſhould have been furniſhed for characterizing parties by geographical diſcrimination. Northern and Southern—Atlantic and Weſtern; whence deſigning men may endeavour to excite a belief, that there is a real difference of local intereſts and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence, within particular diſtricts, is to miſrepreſent the opinions and aims of other diſtricts. You cannot ſhield yourſelves too much againſt the jealouſies and heart-burnings which ſpring from thoſe miſrepreſentations; they tend to render alien to each other thoſe who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection. The inhabitants of our weſtern country have lately had a uſeful leſſon on this

head; they have ſeen in the negociation by the Executive, and in the unanimous ratification by the Senate, of the treaty with Spain, and in the univerſal ſatisfaction at that event, throughout the United States, a deciſive proof how unfounded were the ſuſpicions propagated among them of a policy in the general government, and in the Atlantic States, unfriendly to their intereſts in regard to the Miſſiſſippi: they have been witneſſes to the formation of two treaties, that with Great Britain, and that with Spain, which ſecure to them every thing they could deſire, in reſpect to our foreign relations, towards confirming their proſperity. Will it not be their wiſdom to rely for the preſervation of theſe advantages on the Union by which they were procured? Will they not henceforth be deaf to theſe adviſers, if ſuch there are, who would ſever them from their brethren, and connect them with aliens?

To the efficacy and permanency of your Union, a government for the whole is indiſpenſable—No alliances, however ſtrict, between the parts can be an adequate ſubſtitute; they muſt inevitably experience the infractions and interruptions which all alliances in all times have experienced. Senſible of this momentous truth, you have improved upon your firſt eſſay, by the adoption of a conſtitution of government better calculated than your former

for an intimate Union, and for the efficacious management of your common concerns. This government, the offspring of our own choice, uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full inveſtigation and mature deliberation, completely free in its principles, in the diſtribution of its power, uniting ſecurity with energy, and containing within itſelf a proviſion for its own amendment, has a juſt claim to your confidence and your ſupport. Reſpect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquieſcence in its meaſures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty. The baſis of our political ſyſtems is the right of the people to make and to alter their conſtitutions of government—But, the conſtitution which at any time exiſts, 'till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is ſacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power, and the right of the people, to eſtabliſh government, pre-ſuppoſes the duty of every individual to obey the eſtabliſhed government.

All obſtructions to the execution of the laws, all combinations and aſſociations, under whatever plauſible character, with the real deſign to direct, controul, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the conſtituted authorities, are deſtructive of this fundamental principle, and of fatal tendency. They

ſerve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force—to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation, the will of a party, often a ſmall but artful and enterpriſing minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public adminiſtration the mirror of the ill concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of conſiſtent and wholeſome plans digeſted by common councils, and modified by mutual intereſts.

However combinations or aſſociations of the above deſcription may now and then anſwer popular ends, they are likely, in the courſe of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to ſubvert the power of the people, and to uſurp for themſelves the reins of government; deſtroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjuſt dominion.

Towards the preſervation of your government, and the permanency of your preſent happy ſtate, it is requiſite, not only that you ſteadily diſcountenance irregular oppoſitions to its acknowledged authority, but alſo that you reſiſt with care the ſpirit of innovation upon its principles however ſpecious the pre-

texts.—One method of aſſault may be to effect, in the forms of the conſtitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the ſyſtem, and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown. In all the changes to which you may be invited, remember that time and habit are at leaſt as neceſſary to fix the true character of governments, as of other human inſtitutions,—that experience is the ſureſt ſtandard, by which to teſt the real tendency of the exiſting conſtitution of a country,—that facility in changes, upon the credit of mere hypotheſis and opinion, expoſes to perpetual change from the endleſs variety of hypotheſis and opinion; and remember, eſpecially, that for the efficient management of your common intereſts, in a country ſo extenſive as ours, a government of as much vigour as is conſiſtent with the perfect ſecurity of liberty, is indiſpenſable. Liberty itſelf will find in ſuch a government, with powers properly diſtributed and adjuſted, its ſureſt guardian. It is, indeed, little elſe than a name, where the government is too feeble to withſtand the enterpriſes of faction, to confine each member of the ſociety within the limits preſcribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the ſecure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of perſon and property.

I have already intimated to you, the danger of parties in the ſtate, with particular reference

to the founding of them on geographical diſcriminations. Let me now take a more comprehenſive view, and warn you in the moſt ſolemn manner againſt the baneful effects of the ſpirit of party, generally.

This ſpirit unfortunately, is inſeparable from our nature, having its root in the ſtrongeſt paſſions of the human mind.—It exiſts under different ſhapes in all governments, more or leſs ſtifled, controuled, or repreſſed; but in thoſe of the popular form, it is ſeen in its greateſt rankneſs and is truly their worſt enemy.

The alternate domination of one faction over another, ſharpened by the ſpirit of revenge, natural to party diſſention, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the moſt horrid enormities, is itſelf a frightful deſpotiſm.—But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent deſpotiſm.—The diſorders and miſeries which reſult, gradually incline the minds of men to ſeek ſecurity, and repoſe in the abſolute power of an individual: and ſooner or later the chief of ſome prevailing faction more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this diſpoſition to the purpoſes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.

Without looking forward to an extremity of

this kind (which nevertheleſs ought not to be entirely out of ſight) the common and continual miſchiefs of the ſpirit of party are ſufficient to make it the intereſt and duty of a wiſe people to diſcourage and reſtrain it.

It ſerves always to diſtract the public councils and enfeeble the public adminiſtration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealouſies and falſe alarms; kindles the animoſity of one part againſt another, foments occaſionally riot and inſurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which find a facilitated acceſs to the government itſelf through the channels of party paſſions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are ſubjected to the policy and will of another.

There is an opinion that parties in free countries are uſeful checks upon the adminiſtration of the government, and ſerve to keep alive the ſpirit of liberty. This, within certain limits, is probably true; and in governments of a monarchical caſt, patriotiſm may look with indulgence, if not with favour, upon the ſpirit of party. But in thoſe of the popular character, in governments purely elective, it is a ſpirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency it is certain there will always be enough of that ſpirit for every ſalutary purpoſe. And there being conſtant danger of ex-

ceſs, the effort ought to be, by force of public opinion, to mitigate and aſſuage it. A fire not to be quenched; it demands uniform vigilance to prevent its burſting into a flame, leſt, inſtead of warming, it ſhould conſume.

It is important likewiſe, that the habits of thinking in a free country, ſhould inſpire caution, in thoſe entruſted with its adminiſtration to confine themſelves within their reſpectiv conſtitutional ſpheres, avoiding in the exerciſe of the powers of ſome department to encroach upon another. The ſpirit of encroachment tends to conſolidate the powers of all departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real deſpotiſm. A juſt eſtimate of that love of power, and proneneſs to abuſe it, which predominates in the human heart, is ſufficient to ſatisfy us of the truth of this poſition. The neceſſity of reciprocal checks in the exerciſe of political power; by dividing and diſtributing it into different depoſitories, and conſtituting each the guardian of the public weal againſt invaſions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; ſome of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preſerve them muſt be as neceſſary as to inſtitute them. If, in the opinion of the people, the diſtribution or modification of the conſtitutional powers be in

any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the conſtitution deſignates.—But let there be no change by uſurpation; for though this, in one inſtance, may be the inſtrument of good, it is the cuſtomary weapon by which free governments are deſtroyed.—The precedent muſt always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or tranſient benefit which the uſe can at any time yield.

Of all the diſpoſitions and habits which lead to political proſperity, religion and morality are indiſpenſible ſupports. In vain ſhould that man claim the tribute of patriotiſm, who ſhould labour to ſubvert theſe great pillars of human happineſs, theſe firmeſt props of the duties of men and citizens.—The mere politician equally with the pious man ought to reſpect and to cheriſh them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it ſimply be aſked, where is the ſecurity for property, for reputation, for life, if the ſenſe of religious obligation deſert the oaths, which are the inſtruments of inveſtigation in courts of juſtice? And let us with caution indulge the ſuppoſition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar ſtructure, reaſon and experience both forbid us to expect

that national morality can prevail in excluſion of religious principle.

It is ſubſtantially true, that virtue or morality is a neceſſary ſpring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or leſs force to every ſpecies of free government. Who that is a ſincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to ſhake the foundations of the fabric?

Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, inſtitutions for the general diffuſion of knowledge. In proportion as the ſtructure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is eſſential that public opinion ſhould be enlightened.

As a very important ſource of ſtrength and ſecurity, cheriſh public credit. One method of preſerving it is to uſe it as ſparingly as poſſible, avoiding occaſions of expence by cultivating peace, but remembering alſo that timely diſburſements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater diſburſements to repel it; avoiding likewiſe the accumulation of debt, not only by ſhunning occaſions of expence, but by vigorous exertions in time of peace to diſcharge the debts which unavoidable wars may have occaſioned; not ungenerouſly throwing upon poſterity the burden which we ourſelves

ought to bear. The execution of these maxims belongs to your representatives, but it is necessary that public opinion should co-operate. To facilitate to them the performance of their duty, it is essential that you should practically bear in mind, that towards the payment of debts there must be revenue: that to have revenue there must be taxes; that no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant; that the intrinsic embarrassment inseparable from the selection of the proper objects (which is always choice of difficulties) ought to be a decisive motive for a candid construction of the conduct of government in making it, and for a spirit of acquiescence in the measures for obtaining revenue which the public exigencies may at any time dictate.

Observe good faith and justice towards all nations, cultivate peace and harmony with all; religion and morality enjoin this conduct: and can it be that good policy does not equally enjoin it? It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and, at no distant period, a great nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt, that in the course of time and things, the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it? Can it be, that providence has not connected the permanent

felicity of a nation with its virtue? The experiment, at leaſt, is recommended by every ſentiment which ennobles human nature.—Alas! is it rendered impoſſible by its vices?

In the execution of ſuch a plan, nothing is more eſſential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies againſt particular nations, and paſſionate attachments for others ſhould be excluded; and that in place of them, juſt and amicable feelings towards all, ſhould be cultivated. The nation, which indulges towards another an habitual hatred, or an habitual fondneſs, is in ſome degree a ſlave. It is a ſlave to its animoſity, or to its affection, either of which is ſufficient to lead it aſtray from its duty and its intereſt. Antipathy in one nation againſt another diſpoſes each more readily to offer inſult and injury, to lay hold of ſlight cauſes of umbrage, and to be haughty and intractable, when accidental or trifling occaſions of diſpute occur. Hence frequent colliſions, obſtinate, envenomed, and bloody conteſts. The nation, prompted by ill-will and reſentment, ſometimes impels to war the government, contrary to the beſt calculations of policy. The government ſometimes participates in the national propenſity, and adopts through paſſion what reaſon would reject; at other times, it makes the animoſity of the nation ſubſervient to projects of hoſtility inſtigated by

pride, ambition and other ſiniſter and pernicious motives. The peace often, ſometimes, perhaps, the liberty of nations has been the victim.

So likewiſe, a paſſionate attachment of one nation for another, produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favourite nation, facilitating the illuſion of an imaginary common intereſt, in caſes where no real common intereſt exiſts, and infuſing into one, the intereſts of the other, betrays the former into a participation of the quarrels and wars of the latter, without adequate inducement or juſtification. It leads alſo to conceſſions to the favourite nation of privileges denied to others, which is apt doubly to injure the nation making the conceſſions, by unneceſſarily parting with what ought to have been retained, and by exciting jealouſy, ill-will, and a diſpoſition to retaliate, in the parties from whom equal privileges are withheld: And it gives to ambitious, corrupted, or deluded citizens (who devote themſelves to the favourite nation) facility to betray, or ſacrifice the intereſts of their own country, without odium, ſometimes with popularity: gilding with the appearances of a virtuous ſenſe of obligation, a commendable deference of public opinion, or a laudable zeal for public good, the baſe or fooliſh compliances of ambition, corruption, or infatuation.

As avenues to foreign influence in innumerable ways, ſuch attachments are particularly alarming to the truly enlightened and independent patriot. How many opportunities do they afford to tamper with domeſtic factions, to practiſe the arts of ſeduction, to miſlead public opinion, to influence or awe the public councils. Such an attachment of a ſmall or weak, towards a great and powerful nation, dooms the former to be the ſatellite of the latter.

Againſt the inſidious wiles of foreign influence, (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealouſy of a free people ought to be conſtantly awake; ſince hiſtory and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the moſt baneful foes of Republican Government. But that jealouſy to be uſeful muſt be impartial; elſe it becomes the inſtrument of the very influence to be avoided, inſtead of a defence againſt it. Exceſſive partiality for one foreign nation, and exceſſive diſlike of another, cauſe thoſe whom they actuate to ſee danger only on one ſide, and ſerve to veil and even ſecond the arts of influence on the other. Real patriots, who may reſiſt the intrigues of the favourite, are liable to become ſuſpected and odious; while its tools and dupes uſurp the applauſe and confidence of the people, to ſurrender their intereſts.

The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connections as poſſible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us ſtop.

Europe has a ſet of primary intereſts, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence ſhe muſt be engaged in frequent controverſies, the cauſes of which are eſſentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it muſt be unwiſe in us to implicate ourſelves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary viciſſitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and coliſions of her friendſhips or enmities.

Our detached and diſtant ſituation invites and enables us to purſue a different courſe. If we remain one people, under an efficient government, the period is not far off, when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take ſuch an attitude as will cauſe the neutrality, we may at any time reſolve upon, to be ſcrupulouſly reſpected; when belligerent nations, under the impoſſibility of making acquiſitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may chooſe peace or war, as our intereſt, guided by juſtice, ſhall counſel.

Why forego the advantages of ſo peculiar a ſituation? Why quit our own, to ſtand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our deſtiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and proſperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalſhip, intereſt, humour, or caprice?

'Tis our true policy to ſteer clear of permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world; ſo far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it; for let me not be underſtood as capable of patronizing infidelity to exiſting engagements. I hold the maxim no leſs applicable to public than to private affairs, that honeſty is always the beſt policy. I repeat it, therefore, let thoſe engagements be obſerved in their genuine ſenſe. But in my opinion, it is unneceſſary, and would be unwiſe, to extend them.

Taking care always to keep ourſelves, by ſuitable eſtabliſhments, on a reſpectable defenſive poſture, we may ſafely truſt to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

Harmony, liberal intercourſe with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and intereſt. But even our commercial policy ſhould hold an equal and impartial hand; neither ſeeking nor granting excluſive favours or preferences;—conſulting the natural courſe of

things; diffuſing and diverſifying by gentle means the ſtreams of commerce, but forcing nothing; eſtabliſhing, with powers ſo diſpoſed, in order to give trade a ſtable courſe, to define the rights of our merchants, and to enable the government to ſupport them; conventional rules of intercourſe, the beſt that preſent circumſtances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied, as experience and circumſtances ſhall dictate; conſtantly keeping in view, that 'tis folly in one nation to look for diſintereſted favours from another; that it muſt pay with a portion of its independence for whatever it may accept under that character; that by ſuch acceptance, it may place itſelf in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favours, and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect, or calculate, upon real favours from nation to nation. 'Tis an illuſion which experience muſt cure, which a juſt pride ought to diſcard.

In offering to you, my countrymen, theſe counſels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the ſtrong and laſting impreſſion I could wiſh—that they will controul the uſual current of the paſſions, or prevent our nation from running the courſe which has hitherto marked the deſtiny of na-

tions: But if I may even flatter myſelf, that they may be productive of ſome partial benefit, ſome occaſional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party ſpirit, to warn againſt the miſchiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard againſt the impoſtures of pretended patriotiſm; this hope will be a full recompence for the ſolicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

How far in the diſcharge of my official duties, I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public records and other evidences of my conduct muſt witneſs to you and to the world. To myſelf, the aſſurance of my own conſcience is, that I have at leaſt believed myſelf to be guided by them.

In relation to the ſtill ſubſiſting war in Europe, my proclamation of the 22d of April 1793, is the index to my plan.—Sanctioned by your approving voice, and by that of your Repreſentatives in both Houſes of Congreſs, the ſpirit of that meaſure has continually governed me; uninfluenced by any attempts to deter or divert me from it.

After deliberate examination, with the aid of the beſt lights I could obtain, I was well ſatisfied that our country, under all the circumſtances of the caſe, had a right to take, and was

bound in duty and intereſt, to take a neutral poſition. Having taken it, I determined, as far as ſhould depend upon me, to maintain it with moderation.

The conſiderations which reſpect the right to hold this conduct, it is not neceſſary on this occaſion to detail. I will only obſerve, that according to my underſtanding of the matter, that right, ſo far from being denied by any of the Belligerent Powers, has been virtually admitted by all.

The duty of holding a neutral conduct may be inferred, without any thing more, from the obligation which juſtice and humanity impoſe on every nation, in caſes in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity towards other nations.

The inducements of intereſt for obſerving that conduct will beſt be referred to your own reflections and experience.—With me, a predominent motive has been, to endeavour to gain time to our country to ſettle and mature its yet recent inſtitutions, and to progreſs without interruption, to that degree of ſtrength and conſiſtency, which is neceſſary to give it, humanly ſpeaking, the command of its own fortunes.

Though in reviewing the incidents of my adminiſtration, I am unconſcious of intentional

error: I am nevertheleſs too ſenſible of my defects not to think it probable I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beſeech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I ſhall alſo carry with me the hope that my country will never ceaſe to view them with indulgence; and that after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its ſervice, with an upright zeal, the fruits of incompetent abilities will be conſigned to oblivion, as myſelf muſt ſoon be to the manſions of reſt.

Relying on its kindneſs in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it, which is ſo natural to man who views in it the native ſoil of himſelf and his progenitors for ſeveral generations; I anticipate with pleaſing expectation that retreat, in which I promiſe myſelf to realize, without alloy, the ſweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midſt of my fellow-citizens, the benign influence of good laws under a free government—the ever favourite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I truſt, of our mutual cares, labours and dangers.

G. WASHINGTON.

UNITED STATES,
September, 16, 1796.